



TOWN OF BELMONT
Office of the Selectmen

Remarks of Mr. **Angelo Firenze**, Vice Chair, Board of Selectmen, Town of Belmont, MA
Prepared for MA DTE, Cable Division Public Hearing – Wednesday, Aug. 16, 2006 - 10:00am

Good morning. I am here today representing the Town of Belmont, Massachusetts.

As one of three people elected to the Board of Selectmen, it is my job to represent the public interest of the Town of Belmont.

But I am also a businessman committed to providing an environment where businesses can thrive and contribute to a vibrant local economy, as free as possible from burdensome regulations.

So from my perspective in the matter before you today, I strongly **oppose** the proposed rulemaking, because it is not in the best interests of the 25,000 residents of Belmont. I also happen to believe that the rule change may not even be in the long-term business interest of the single company that has triggered this hearing, Verizon.

First of all, much of the rationale for our opposition to this rulemaking has already been submitted to the Cable Division by Attorneys August and Epstein in comments written on behalf of the Town of Belmont and twenty-seven other towns, cities and local organizations. I am here today to underscore the importance of this issue for the people of Belmont and our neighboring communities.

Specifically the proposed rule change is unworkable as it would not allow enough time for Belmont town officials to reasonably assess community needs, or to negotiate a license, much less review any proposed license in advance of a vote to approve or deny.

Moreover, while it's not explicit in the proposed rulemaking, an obvious effect of the rule change will undermine our town's ability to adequately and responsibly negotiate for franchise fees and the capital support that funds local PEG access facilities and equipment to the newly created Belmont Media Center. While not all of our residents are cable TV subscribers, everyone who lives in Belmont, does benefit and is able to take advantage of the services, classes and facilities provided at no cost through our PEG access provider. Many of the services provided by Belmont Media Center are absolutely vital to effective local government and add greatly to community, educational, and economic development.

And given that Congress is now considering a rewrite of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the Board of Selectmen feel it would be imprudent for Massachusetts to be changing state franchising rules when the federal laws that also govern local franchising may be altered. The unintended result would likely make it much more difficult and unnecessarily complex to harmonize state rules with federal mandates. In the end, it will inevitably fall to the towns and cities in Massachusetts, as it often does, to figure out how to abide by laws and regulations that are suddenly more complex and ambiguous.

Finally I alluded to what I think is in the best interest of Verizon. While I sincerely want Verizon to do well and to be successful in providing much needed competition to our current cable TV provider, I also want Verizon to understand the critical need for local regulations and comply with them.

In the matter before the Cable Division today, Verizon has spent a considerable amount of time and money lobbying state and local officials, and mounting a public relations campaign to influence public opinion all in an attempt to get this rule changed.

As a duly elected public official, I'd like to suggest to the Cable Division that Verizon does not represent the public interest of the residents of Belmont. This is my responsibility as deemed by the voters. Furthermore, as a businessman, I sincerely believe that Verizon could much better serve my constituents in Belmont and perhaps its own shareholders by spending a little less time trying to rewrite laws to match their business plans and spend more time figuring out how to run their business according to the laws which already exist.

In conclusion, as a member of the Belmont Board of Selectmen, and in what, I believe, is in the best interest of the citizens of our town I **oppose** the proposed rulemaking. I thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony today.